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Ramin Haerizadeh

... But I prefer dogs with uncropped tails
 September 13 - October 20, 2012



Press release

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Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present *... But I prefer dogs with uncropped tails* ♦, the first solo show in France by Ramin Haerizadeh, one of the major figures on the contemporary Iranian scene.

Known for the distinctive method and gusto with which he subverts images by the use of collage and representations of his own person as the ambiguous protagonist of a theatre of appearances, Ramin Haerizadeh will be presenting a new series of works inaugurating a significant phase in his production.

Allegorical representations of idealised nudes, peaceful Dutch landscapes, commissioned portraits of aristocrats, still lifes of fruits and musical instruments... Ramin Haerizadeh explores a new corpus of images cut out from oil paintings found in Dubai's bazaar that clumsily ape the iconographic and stylistic clichés of European painting. Working with these sloppy pastiches churned out by artisans in China, Haerizadeh uses their easy visual allure and reassuring familiarity to entice the beholders into confronting a palimpsest-work which questions the processes of repetition, imitation and transformation at work in the writing of history.

This destabilisation of representation is epitomised in the work that greets visitors here, which applies an all-over, saturating use of fragments to images of May 1968 and of Iranian demonstrators during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Made indistinguishable by a uniform black-and-white treatment, these archive images of the two events merge in an ironic conflation of historical events, with the French libertarian uprising collapsing into the Iranian return to state religion. A colourful portrait of a woman of letters, recalling the iconography of the Marquise de Pompadour, emerges from the magma of monochrome images, only to be "decapitated"; the noble expression of the original replaced by the monstrous combination of a doll's head and the inquisitorial frown of the Ayatollah Khomeini – as if to tell us that dictators always proceed in disguise.

Inspired by the Louvre project in Abu Dhabi, another picture shows a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* beneath the ceiling of the famous Apollo Gallery, fragmented and reworked by a play of symmetry reminiscent of traditional Persian ornamental patterns and the mirror effects used by the modern Iranian artist Mounir Farmanfarmaian. This "orientalisation" of space, already magnificently explored in Haerizadeh's *Wonders of Nature* series, displays a refined aestheticism that contrasts with the violent treatment of *Mona Lisa* and the multifarious female figures in the image, all of them mishandled. In reference to the censorship that hangs over artists in the Muslim world, and to repressed desires that strikes at any manifestation of eroticism, the famous, enigmatic smile of Leonardo's model - hinting at forbidden female pleasure - has been torn away, leaving the image of a child's mouth forced wide by the dentist's tongs, its forced smile possibly evoking the tribulations of women under the Islamic regime.

With great creative liberty, Haerizadeh superposes and tears open strata of images drawn from a medley of sources. Whereas his own persona appears more seldom in these works, featuring only in hide-and-seek games with the visitor, the angels of *The Mourning of Christ* painted by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, serve as a leitmotiv in the show, as the heady excerpts from Pasolini's *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom*, which are juxtaposed here and there with newspaper cuttings and regressive graffiti by Keith Haring. From these abrupt combinations subliminally haunted by the faces of dictators – Khomeini, Hitler, Ahmadinejad – emerges a new and terrifying regime of the image within which an inoffensive Coke ad can turn into an incitation to rape. To accompany the exhibition, a 60-page catalogue is being published in partnership with Éditions Dilecta, and writer and curator Vali Mahlouji.

♦ Pun on a poem by the Nobel Prize-winning Polish writer Wislawa Szymborska, "Possibilities."

Ramin Haerizadeh was born in Tehran in 1975 and lives and works in Dubai. He came to international attention in the late 2000s notably as a result of the Saatchi Gallery exhibition *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East*. Ramin Haerizadeh appropriates images of all kinds – the images put out by power and the “victors of history” – and transforms them into striking apocalyptic visions that are both poetic and political. He creates multiple representations of the artist as a solitary figure, disguised, bearded and veiled, as a metaphor for a culture of dissimulation.

Ramin Haerizadeh has had three solo shows at the Isabelle van den Eynde gallery in Dubai and featured in a number of major group shows such as *The Right to Protest* at the Museum on the Seam in Jerusalem, *Big Brother: l'artiste face aux tyrans* at the Palais des Arts in Dinard and the Sharjah Biennial in 2011. His works are held in a number of prestigious private and public collections including the British Museum, the Charles Saatchi collection (London), the Rosenblum collection (Paris), the Devi Art Foundation (New Delhi), the Farook collection (Dubai), the Hafiz Foundation (Farjam Collection, Dubai) and the Rubell Family Collection (Miami).

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